

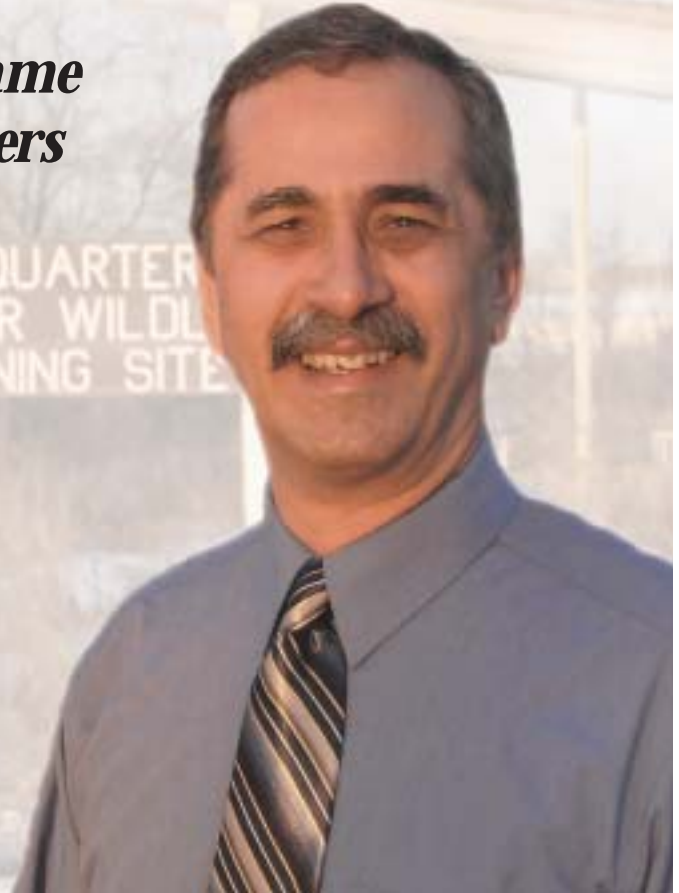
A CONVERSATION WITH TERRY STEINWAND

New Director is Familiar Name with State Hunters and Anglers

Terry Steinwand took over as North Dakota Game and Fish Department director on January 1, following retirement of Dean Hildebrand, who had served as director since mid-1996.

Many *OUTDOORS* readers will recognize Steinwand's name, as he was chief of the Department's fisheries division for more than 15 years and has been a frequent contributor and information source for this magazine.

We asked Terry to share some of his philosophies and expectations as he begins his term as director.



CRAIG BIRHLE

The Game and Fish Department director is appointed by the governor. After Dean Hildebrand announced he would retire, there was typical speculation about whether the next director would be a wildlife “professional” – someone from within the Game and Fish Department or other wildlife agency. What does being a professional mean to you, and how does that help you as you step into this job?

A professional means a number of things, but first and foremost, it's understanding the resources, and the people who work with those resources. We know what our responsibilities are to North Dakota's fish and wildlife resources, and the habitat that it takes to raise that resource.

Until you actually work in this field, I think it's really tough to completely understand what we really mean when we talk habitat.

For example, “water is habitat.” Well, just having water doesn't necessarily mean you are going to have a good fishery. It just takes a lot more than that.

And I think another factor is understanding the culture of the agency itself. Most of us who work at Game and Fish are hunters and anglers, but I think we tend to take more of a, let's say, “puristic” view of how things should be done. Ethics and doing things the right way are important.

Things are working pretty well in the Department right now. Of course, we can always do better. I'm going to push a little bit in some areas, but I don't see any major changes.

You grew up on a farm. Does that help you as Game and Fish director?

I think so. I know from experience how tough farming can be. I understand why someone would choose to not allow hunting, or save their hunting land for their own family. But I also understand the Game and Fish Department's responsibilities, which involve providing habitat, improving fish and wildlife resources, and getting access for hunters and anglers on the ground.

If you understand where someone is coming from, I think there's a better chance that you can find some common ground where you can work together. We already have a lot of programs that involve willing landowners as cooperators.

One of my goals is to try to generate more access, not necessarily as part of our PLOTS program, but in addition to it, by working with farmers to allow hunting after they're done ... spreading the wealth around is what it amounts to.

In a broad sense, farming and wildlife management aren't all that different. They depend on Mother Nature an awful lot. You can't grow crops, or wildlife, when the weather turns against you.

How's Terry Steinwand going to be different than Dean Hildebrand?

Probably not a whole lot different. My goal isn't to make Terry Steinwand a household name. In fact, if they don't know who the director is, that's probably a good thing, because fishing and hunting is so good they don't have to complain.

I still plan on getting out there. I love to go out to meetings. You learn something from every one of them. I do want to get out and talk to people. What are they thinking? What are they happy with? What are they not happy with?

Internal issues?

One thing I would like to do is take a look at how we do things on a bureaucratic level. I hate bureaucracy, recognizing that it has to be there at some level, but let's reduce that to the extent possible. We've made great strides with internet licensing the last several years. We'll keep trying to make it easier to deal with the Game and Fish Department.

External issues?

The director may be changing but the issues never really do. ANS (aquatic nuisance species), CRP (Conservation Reserve Program), SOL (Save Our Lakes), Missouri River System water management, hunting access, the list goes on. We're working on all of them.

But none of them are easy situations. We don't necessarily deal with easy situations in the Game and Fish Department. And some-

times it can be a real slow process. Take access, for instance. I'm convinced that sometime in the next 10 years we're going to get our arms around this issue, and we're going to figure out how to do it.

But we can't do it all ourselves, either. Don't always put the burden on the government. Hunters and anglers need to take some initiative, too. And, I think, a lot of people have.

What direction do you have from Governor Hoeven?

Growing the resource. Balancing all interests. Communicating with the public. With the habitat base we have now, growing the resource is going to be relatively easy. It could become a little more difficult if the drought in certain parts of the state continues, or if we lose CRP. But I think we can do that.

Communicating, I think, is relatively easy. We've been doing that. We have many processes in place.

I think the toughest job is balancing all the interests. I don't think it's as easy as balancing a see-saw. You're talking a lot of interests. It's more like putting a round board on a basketball. It's not just two interests up and down. It's a whole bunch of competing interests going a whole bunch of different directions.

Anything yet that has caused you to lose sleep?

Nothing yet. I'm sure I will lose some sleep over some issues. But I don't consider that a bad thing. If it's an important issue, and you don't lose any sleep, you probably don't care enough.

What's your key for being a successful Game and Fish director?

Well, I know that the key to failure is trying to make everybody happy. I'm not going to try to make everybody happy. I'm going to try to do the right thing for North Dakota.

As a Department, I think we've done that over all. We listen to different interests. Sometimes we have disagreements. Our first responsibility is to our resources.

Right now, however, across the state as a whole, things are OK. Most hunters and anglers are happy because our resources are in pretty good shape. We've got our work cut out for us to keep things that way.